

Consuming the news and building civic participation

Maria José Brites

Lusophone University of Porto (ULP) and New University of Lisbon (UNL), Portugal

Abstract:

This article argues that there is a connection between civic cultures and literacy levels and that this relation is enhanced by knowledge, a willingness to be informed and civic participation. It is considered that those who are educated towards the news possess a greater awareness of information and news on civic life (Moeller, 2009) and on participation (Milner, 2009:187). To understand the social implications of the modern mediatized society and the repercussions for civic participation better, we used a sample of twelve youngsters with different types and intensities of participation and news consumption in Portugal. By understanding their journalistic and participative characters, we can better perceive their social contexts. In considering this, we have established two main questions: What is the youngsters' level of news consumption and what is its relationship to their participation activities? How do both of these aspects relate to social relationships and the youngsters' ability to interact and deal with news media?

Keywords: Young people, news, participation, literacy

1. Introduction

This article reflects on the ambivalent daily life tensions between news consumption and production, on the one hand, and civic practices among young citizens in Portugal, on the other hand, by considering the reciprocal role of media and civic literacies. Buckingham (2006: 18) recognizes the complexity in researching news and youngsters, and considers youngsters, news and participation as a potentially difficult issue. It is also a fact that there is little longitudinal research in media studies and particularly regarding the connections between the news, media and youth. Examining this can give us a more comprehensive sense of audience perspectives on why and how people conduct their lives. This is also

relevant when thinking about the psychological and sociological dimensions of the process and the macro- and micro-level changes that affect the answers of research participants at certain moments (Ruspini, 2002: 135).

Halloran alerted scholars to the need to look at media from the perspective of a vast social context of daily interactions and to pursue a holistic approach (1998: 10). Given this, this article aims to provide more insights into the daily life options that are considered over a two-year period that challenge the concepts that consider that consuming news and participation are not relevant activities for youngsters' lives.

The longitudinal research (2010–2011) on youth, news and participation was conducted with the same young people throughout, since we took Kitzinger's advice, who considers longitudinal research to be more powerful when the same sample is used (2004: 177). To reflect on the subject, we intentionally selected a group of young people with a certain degree of participation coming from different social backgrounds. The group cannot be identified simply as a group of young activists, because only a part of the group was really committed to social, cultural and political issues. The longitudinal perspective of the research will reveal the intensity of participation, but also the fragility of casual commitments towards society, indicating that the existence of participation does not always indicate high-quality participation. By understanding their journalistic and participative characteristics, we can gain a better perception of their social contexts, as these aspects are interconnected. In considering this, we have established two main questions: What is the youngsters' level of news consumption and what is its relationship to their participation activities? How do both of these aspects relate to social relationships and the youngsters' ability to interact and deal with news media?

2. Mediated citizenship and everyday contexts

Schrøder (2012) established a model outlining five stages, and our main interests in this paper relate to the fourth and fifth stages associated with the new millennium: participatory citizenship and ubiquitous citizenship (Schrøder, 2012). The first relates mainly to technological innovations and how they are enhancing the debate, which is increasingly intense, with enthusiastic and pessimistic views on the possibilities, potentials and promises generated by participation through the internet. From the point of view of audience research, this was the turning point. The later stage helps in understanding society as complex and subjective, pointing to different ways of participating in daily life and institutions, and in undertaking political engagement. In the era of the internet and mediated democracy, the challenge is to establish connections between the online and offline environments (Banaj and Buckingham, 2010; Dahlgren, 2010; Mascheroni, 2010). Even if the internet implies a positive liaison between citizens and participation, it cannot always work by itself in isolation; it is therefore essential to consider social complexities. "The notion of civic culture thus points to those features of the sociocultural world that constitute everyday preconditions for all democratic participation: in the institutions of civil

society, engagement in the public sphere, and involvement in political activity broadly understood" (Dahlgren, 2000: 336).

As reality is prismatic, there is a need to use a variety of methods that can be fruitful (Jensen and Rosengren, 1990; Halloran, 1998). This idea was also developed by researchers such as Barker (2006), Morley (2006) and Press (2006), who put the future of audience research on communication and the necessary development of political/civic questions in the field into perspective (Press, 2006: 93).

Journalism is clearly a matter of interest within the research, although it is undoubtedly seen as a secondary subject within young media audience research (Bird, 2011). Thinking about youngsters and news/participation can be a controversial issue, and Buckingham (2006: 18) recognizes the difficulty in researching news and youngsters. There is an ongoing problematic challenge with journalism, particularly regarding its importance in fulfilling young people's needs in democratic societies. Meijer (2006) indicates that young people pay less attention to conventional media-based news because they can access a huge environment of media options.

Carter (2009) writes about the need to ask youngsters about their desires and suggestions regarding news content and formats, because this is a chance to engage them with the news. Patterson (2007: 5) calls attention to the fact that young people's interest in the news will affect the economic vitality and quality of news media companies. Cushion (2006), Meijer (2006) and Wayne, Petley, Murray and Henderson (2010) illustrate that youngsters are also interested in quality news. One of the preliminary indications of this PhD research is that, even if they say they do not like news and that they do not follow the news, an agenda-setting pattern can be found in their answers regarding which subjects concern them most.

We must also remember the importance of understanding all of these implications within a view of daily life, in family, peer and school contexts, such as, for instance, when we think about news and news talk (Lemish, 2007; Bird, 2010). This is a vital aspect of the research: to consider journalism, consumption and participation in relation to daily life actions, needs and emotions. In addition, as Chantal Mouffe states (2005), there is a need to confront the political and politics emotionally and this is deeply embedded in our daily desires.

3. Is media literacy attainable by everyone?

By considering audiences, learning, media and participation, literacy is a complex achievement. The term 'literacy' was developed in the 19th century. It is intended to describe the "ability to read and write as it spread among common people, distinguishing itself from the word 'literature' which was traditionally associated with high culture" (Livingstone, Papaioannou, Pérez and Wijnen, 2012: 3). Today, media literacy research is multidisciplinary (Livingstone, Papaioannou, Pérez and Wijnen, 2012). There are huge differences and tensions regarding the conceptual framing of media literacy. Recent perspectives link media literacy to the common approach that is connected to the critical

ability to interpret, critically view and produce media tasks while integrating a civic understanding of the world. “Locally situated literacies take place within local cultures, in which people ‘work out their projects’ by acting on configurations of elements that include themselves, the materials, tools and tasks at hand, and others” (Underwood, Parker and Stone, 2013: 480).

Recent developments in the media landscape, together with international collaborations in media literacy research, further broaden the range of multi- and interdisciplinary approaches to media literacy, linking together literacies based on computer/ICT skills and the capacities of critical understanding, creative expression, and political and civic participation. (Livingstone, Papaioannou, Pérez and Wijnen, 2012: 3)

Civic literacy, “the knowledge and ability capacity of citizens to make sense of their political world” (Milner, 2002: 1), has deep connections to media literacy, pointing to an idea of civic media literacy, which should be considered as a fundamental approach within a mediatized society.

In this article, we will pay attention to the intersections of media and civic literacy. Media literacy is considered in terms of its connections to civic literacy. Both poles are deeply connected, engaged in a virtuous cycle. Both act in a virtuous circle and concern media benefits from the perspective of daily life and civic needs.

If media are to play a significant role in facilitating participation in the public sphere and promoting democratic values, far greater institutional efforts will be required. Policy should be grounded in the experiences of media use, learning, expression and civic participation among citizens. (Livingstone, Papaioannou Pérez and Wijnen, 2012: 7)

Paul Mihailidis (2011) states that media literacy in this century “will be about enabling new civic voices, ones that are tolerant, purposive, and that are active in the face of the global challenges we collectively face” (2011: 5).

According to Peter Dahlgren (2009), knowledge is a starting point for participation; and to participate one needs a certain degree of literacy, a valid civic knowledge. As the author points out, this is an ongoing and important issue. Among all of the media space, journalism still plays a relevant role in connecting people with society; literacy for journalism also implies literacy for citizenship. Gonnet considers that school plays a key role in promoting the sense-making construction of society and a media sense making, contributing to active roles being played in mediated society (2007: 41). Gonnet calls attention to the need to promote school journalism, although he recognizes that results are not always what we would expect (Gonnet, 2007: 118). Manuel Pinto (Gomes, 2011: 684–685) says that some of these results develop slowly, but that they are nevertheless very

important now and then. Lewis refers to informed citizenship as news value (Lewis, 2006: 310) and that it is really important to consider news and its implications for citizenship (Lewis, 2006: 310–311).

Journalism is a powerful tool in the process of the selection, collection, treatment and dissemination of public-interest information, to be used in education and as a means of community empowerment. Journalism literacy (its role in interpreting news content and the ability to participate in the media) is, thus, intrinsically connected to citizenship literacy (Milner, 2009; Moeller, 2009; Mihailidis, 2012; Hobbs, Geltner and Landis, 2011; Brites, 2013).

In Portugal, there are fragmented proposals regarding what role the news media and the school play in such learning: the ground-breaking project *Público na Escola*; the Media Education Project in the Castelo Branco district (2007–2011), supported by the FCT and the *Reconquista*; MEDIALAB (*Jornal de Notícias* and *Diário de Notícias*); and, recently, the Journalism at School project by *Setúbal da Rede*. As we observed in previous research on the role of the news in the civic construction of youths aged 15 to 18 years old (Brites, 2013), family and school are fundamental in terms of news consumption and participation. Thus, it is possible to state that there is room to explore this educational connection between the news media and youth communities. Hobbs, Cohn-Geltner and Landis (2011) warn us of an incipient practice in helping the young to understand the news and to feel engaged by such media. Media literacy focused on the news will thus be an important way in which to define the citizenship possibilities in society (Buckingham, 2000/2006; Dahlgren, 2009).

Education and literacy are lifelong learning processes, processes in which individuals and groups have empowerment responsibilities (Frau-Meigs, 2008: 173). The accumulation of digital capital is relevant in terms of preventing (meditated) social exclusion (Brites, 2010; Rojas *et al*, 2011; Brites, 2012). Jesús Martín-Barbero notes that one of the strategic challenges of the information society is to consider its relationship to social exclusion (2003/1987: 14). Exclusion gradations are sometimes less considered when thinking about literacy skills, abilities and contexts.

4. Methodological approach: The use of a combined methodology

Given the previous discussions on youth, news and participation relationships, we consider the following questions: What is the youngsters' level of news consumption and what is its relationship to their participation activities? How do both of these aspects relate to social relationships and the youngsters' ability to interact and deal with news media?

To capture the differences and similarities over time better and to capture different contexts during the research, was decided to use a combined longitudinal methodology, since the temporal dimensions of comparative research are a very important component due to the communication flux across time (Gurevitch and Blumler, 2004). By adopting this methodology over time, the research can better contextualize the consumption dimensions and their connections to daily life options. One of the challenges of longitudinal research with young people is keeping the participants interested in the research. Bagnoli and Clark

(2010: 110) and Kitzinger (2004: 177) consider longitudinal research as more powerful with the same sample. Within this model, we can better perceive changes and maintenance over time, as well as understand the practices, the quality of the practices and attitudes. Longitudinal data can be very fruitful in terms of understanding motivations, attitudes and behaviours.

The research started with direct observations in the low-income, mostly with social workers at a community youth centre and youngsters who attended a monthly neighbourhood assembly, where they discussed issues in the community. The first group of interviews was conducted between March and October 2010¹; the second group of interviews between January 24, 2011 (intentionally started the day after the Presidential Elections) and February 22, 2011²; and the focus groups (traditional and participatory focus groups³) were held between September and November 2011⁴.

The focus groups were decided on because we wanted to hear the participants talk to each other beyond the semi-structured interview research possibilities. After we managed to get everyone available at the same time, we had to create three different groups: Group 1 was from a low-income area/social-housing neighbourhood of Porto, and Groups 2 and 3 included the most committed youngsters, when considering their consumption of news and participation. Groups 2 and 3 considered themselves as deviant young activists, in contrast to common youngsters who “don’t care”.

At the end of the focus-group session, they were challenged with a task. They were asked to go into the field and ask some questions to other youngsters about the issues that were discussed in the first meeting. This second focus-group session for each group was a participatory focus group, with the youths as *quasi*-researchers. This was intended as a space for them to present their fieldwork and discuss it, which was of great value because they also used the opportunity to research different things. For instance, one of the girls used this experience to talk with her schoolmates and try to politicize them; and two of the boys, as an exception to the rule, decided to talk to their mothers and grandparents to establish points of comparison between the generations. “Youth researching youth is an important goal to pursue in participatory research endeavours” (Higgins, Nairn and Sligo, 2007: 110).

The focus groups were conducted and transcribed by the researcher and they ran for between one hour and two hours. The interview and focus-group data was analysed using MaxQda, which was designed for qualitative research analysis, and the data was analysed at the first level by reading the transcriptions, and then by starting to create profiles based on the youngsters’ news consumption, political news consumption and participation. Although they had different backgrounds and social capital, we must stress that we preferred to create profiles based on the core issues of the research on youth, news and participation, rather than employing the social capital approach. Through the identified process of analysis of the interview and focus-group transcripts, two different profiles (the names provided have been changed to ensure anonymity) were established: occasional and uninformed participants and politically engaged and informed participants.

5. Two different poles; two different realities

Profile 1: Occasional and uninformed participants

According to Bourdieu (1987), the cultural capital transmitted by the family (cultural resources, competences and power) is accumulated and imposed as an essential hypothesis for the understanding, for instance, of the differences in school results in different social classes. Cultural capital may be presented because of the incorporated state, a state that is objectified and institutionalized. This cultural capital prevails only as long as it is appropriate. Social capital includes education, family traditions and trajectories, and other social sources (the digital media currently being part of this capital), with the extension of cultural transference to the younger generation. The symbolic power is based precisely on obtaining cultural symbols, value instruments of social inclusion, which leads us to consider that the inclusion of digital media and the internet in this equation is currently reinforced.

This profile includes five youths (two females and three males; three 15-year-olds, a 17-year-old and an 18-year-old in 2010) who all live in low-income areas/social-housing neighbourhoods. We can thus state that the adjacent capital prevails at different levels, although we should highlight that not all of the selected youths that lived in the neighbourhood were included in this profile. The parents' education does not go beyond primary school level and is dominated by lower secondary education, they have low-skilled jobs and their internet access is virtually nil; thus, denoting a low technological capital.

In terms of news information consumption, TV is a valued medium in this group of youths in different contexts. That is apparent when the informants refer to news and when they are asked how they have learned about the issues that matter to them. Furthermore, the news is a motive for conversation within the family (although not very intense, this is relevant in a context where such conversations and news consumption are scarce). News conversations are also associated with risk and danger prevention (Lemish, 2007). TV is used to illustrate the dangers, the deviations and the norms – it sits in the living room, for all to see, and its content provides an easy example for prevention. The parents and even some of the youths consider the new media a place of risk associated with (unknown) use and content.

In 2010, the media used for obtaining information in this group was mainly the TV, switched on in the living room or kitchen. Beatriz expresses how her mother uses TV as a guiding medium when she mentions how they watch and comment on TV news at home:

Yes, I watch [the news] with my mom and my brother. We comment, and when my mom sees the dangers, she says, "See, don't throw yourself into that". My mom warns me and my brother. (Beatriz, Interview 1)

There are also cases in these families where a lack of dialogue is noticeable. Dino (the only one without an email account at the time of the first interview and with very little recourse to deal with media) hints at this situation when he suggests that his father likes to watch the news in silence, reinforcing how they do not talk about it. He states that he likes to watch movies at the community centre, although he can watch them at home, because there he feels more at ease and can talk about what he sees and hears.

Well, and at least at night you watch it with your parents, right?

Yes, my father doesn't want to watch anything else, just the news.

Why do you say that?

Because he likes to watch everything. He likes to watch the news on TV.

Do you talk about what you watch?

No, no ... no. (Dino, Interview 1)

These youths read the newspapers that their parents buy (the most mentioned are the popular *Jornal de Notícias* or a daily sports newspaper), or only have access to them when they go to the local coffeehouse. Gossip and soap opera magazines are also signalled as elements that fill up this group's news references, boys included. The magazines embarrassedly identified as "gossip magazines" (*TV Guia, Maria, Cuore*), and bought by their mothers or female friends, are also pointed out as news sources.

The lack of interest in following news on politics, namely during the election period, was another characteristic of this first group. When present, it is achieved by means of the TV (especially via the nightly news), as it occurred during the 2009 and 2011 elections. Conversations about politics are occasionally held within the family, where the youths are usually listeners rather than participants. A line is drawn that associates politics with trust and restricted spaces in the private sphere, with some attention being given to approaches that may be problematic. Yet, it still constitutes a focus for the circulation of political information that should not be discarded. There was clearly a deficit when following the elections, as well as in not using conversation as a means to discuss them. There are elements that indicate a voluntary estrangement from political topics.

There is an absence of information and conversation about elections and politics in this profile, when comparing 2010 and 2011. The subject may occur in the private sphere, among family members and, at the very least, among school friends – nevertheless, these conversations are shallow and often marked by unusual events.

For this profile, the focus is on the family's influence on the low consumption of news – a not very intense consumption, and in such a way as to avoid conflict. This situation is verified over time. The news was associated with the family context, although that does not always mean an investment in the reinforcement of consumption, or a family integration that will allow for a deeper dialogue.

In 2011, in the second year of our contact, this tendency towards low news consumption was noteworthy when the informants referred to whom/what encouraged

them to consume news. In this case, the central focus rested on the family. Rute associated the news with something boring. Dino, who liked to be at the community centre because he was more comfortable there, said he now talked more about the news with his parents, and that they talked mainly about “*disasters, sometimes violence, politics*” (Dino, Interview 2), thus acknowledging the transformation from the previous environment of a silent reception of the news at home.

As far as general and political information consumption is concerned, the family had a leading role in this profile (although not always as a two-way dialogue, especially on political subjects), which was also linked to the prevention of certain dangers. However, youngsters were not interested in general news, had less confidence in producing their own media content (such as blogs) and confused news with publicity.

In 2010, this profile was characterized by a centrality of participation activities reported mainly in the motives by which they were selected (participating in a monthly neighbourhood assembly), but that did not continue in 2011. These are basically participation processes that are dependent on the opportunities created, so that these youths will carry them out. In this profile, participation is very much dependent on the opportunities that society (schools and local community) promotes rather than in a proactive action from the youngsters.

Let us begin with the monthly neighbourhood assembly participation, which, according to the participants, was considered as relevant. The space where it takes place is essentially seen as a life structure, a fundamental structure to which they can relate, and that they keep on visiting, even when they grow up and stop going on a daily basis. It is somewhat of a family “nest”, even if seldom visited. The assemblies are regarded as moments in which to prepare activities, think, learn how to mingle and have some company. They also create the opportunity for the transmission of ideas and collective debate; therefore, posing questions that go beyond the mere conviviality and demarcation of ideas. During the assemblies that we attended, not only were more boys present, but it was also the boys who were more at ease in manifesting their ideas and holding their ground (several field notes were made on this aspect throughout 2010).

The assemblies were also useful for them to keep in touch with community news, but were also useful on a personal level: there they could meet other youths from the neighbourhood, even though this is also sometimes portrayed as a place of social risk in the interviewees’ discourses. It should be mentioned that four of the individuals from this profile from the neighbourhood where the monthly neighbourhood assembly occurred live next to each other and have the centre as a common space. The widely and intricately established social connections and networks are fundamental for emancipation and for competence reinforcement. Participation, however, may also be marked by a type of network management that is usually identified as being between us and them. Social risk management reflects the stigma associated with life in a social-housing neighbourhood.

Were you more of the quiet type [at the assemblies]?

No, I was more opiniative, opinionated? And talkative. At first, I was shy, but then I gave my opinion. I didn't know many people there, just one or two.

You didn't know anybody? You live here...

I had seen them before but didn't talk to them. I don't talk to people from the neighbourhood. I don't share a lot with the people from the neighbourhood. I would talk to them here but not outside.

Why not?

Because they're from the neighbourhood. I'm not really sure who I'm dealing with.

Does that come from you or from your parents?

More from my parents, but I also think that they just want what is best for me ... that's it. (Rute, Interview 1)⁵

Almost all of the youths abandoned the types of participation for which they had been selected, and decreased their participation intensity, thus affecting the quality of their participation. We found only one fragile exception, Dino, who attended the assembly the day we performed the second interview, although in this case, the participation was favoured by the fact that it was scheduled practically at the same time as the assembly. Dino, who presented many difficulties in oral expression and digital inclusion, was one of the most enthusiastic regarding the research, being one of the least active in society and one of the most concerned in terms of his family's well-being (he considered participation in household tasks at home as a way of helping and participating).

Dino took the focus-group tasks⁶ very seriously but was also very nervous. The participatory focus group constituted Dino's empowering moment. During the research's different stages, this profile's youths presented mostly micro-level ways of participating (such as participating in the direct community, mostly connected to an interface with people that they knew). Within the school context, two youths (Beatriz⁷ and Fernando) mentioned a protest:

I've been to a school protest, a strike. Two employees were fighting at the school, so we liked one a lot, and the other ... It wasn't that we didn't like him, but since we liked the other more, and he was right, and the council president had a meeting at the library with all of us to vote, and then we had a protest to see who was right. We had a vote with papers. Ours had more votes, but the other one was there longer. They both stayed at the school. (Beatriz, Interview 1)

As far as voting is concerned, the only person in this profile that voted did not consider the fact and act of voting to be very important.

However, in 2011, Vasco stopped attending the assemblies, and abandoned the blog related to school activities that he had started the previous year and that was done, as he stated, by copying content that he found on other sites on the internet.

The blog was started about a year ago, for the school, so that we learned how to set up a blog, but I ... since I was interested in this subject, I chose to create one on environmental impact. I looked up several topics on the subject, some videos, and I also added some games, but all on the subject I researched.

Did you keep the blog?

It [the blog] is active ... but then I forgot the password and didn't update it.
(Vasco, Interview 1)

By the end of 2011, in the focus-group stage, self-reported participation by the individuals in this profile group faded. We relativized the implicit devaluation of the intensity in participation, which was clear from the answers below, only because the collection of individual information was different from the collective information. It is not possible in this case to explain in detail the same information that we could gain from the one-to-one interviews. We also believe that the youths employ ways of participating in the focus group that avoid a negative image of the self in front of the rest of the group. Not to participate is, to some extent, identified as being *cool*.

Profile 2: Politically engaged and informed participants

This profile of informed consumer youths – all of them with high levels of participation, including political participation, and a strong information use/consumption and production, especially in politics (including mainstream newspapers) – includes seven youths (three girls and four boys, aged between 15 and 18) with an economic and cultural capital that ranges from low to medium/high and high. There is, however, a general social and civic capital enhancing their interest at being informed. These individuals benefitted from an environment that, even if avoiding high economic capital, allowed and continues to allow for family (or even for friends) contact/environments, and for the personal construction (friends and colleagues) of civic capital that favoured self-capacitation and which exists regardless of the adjacent economic and cultural capital. These ties of social conviviality, with the reinforcement of knowledge networks, are crucial – the more widened these conviviality networks are, the greater is the possibility of reinforcing the social capital that benefits from their reinforcement (Bourdieu, 1983). Furthermore, the grandparents are elements of discourse among this group's youths, and even in those cases where the grandparents did not live with the informant youths, this was consistent over time.

This profile reveals the importance of sociability networks in consuming, speaking about and creating knowledge circulation. In this group, the sociability networks are the cause-and-effect of interest and participation, networks that are autonomous in relation to the economic and cultural capital that exists in the family. Although a part of the group possesses a very high family capital in a cultural, economic, social and also a civic sense, another part does not possess the economic, and in some cases, also the cultural assets;

however, they make up for it with an effort in personal construction, and also benefit from a social and civic capital developed at home with their parents and/or grandparents.

We watch the news when we have dinner together: Watching the news, if we had dinner later, at the 9pm news service. Although we have similar ideas, each one has a different perspective. Therefore, we discuss the news. It's cool! We discuss until two in the morning. (Natércia, Interview 1)

News made me have an interest in politics and in other issues, in society and citizenship. I started very early to watch the news because of the influence of my grandmother. And afterwards, I also started to enjoy having my opinion. It is through the news that we are constantly informed, so that we can have an opinion and the right to criticize (or not criticize). (Carlos, Interview 1)

Starting with news information, we will see that the conversations about the news go beyond the family, friends and school dimensions, and are a daily constant in the everyday life of different social networks. Yet, this is clearly not the group that represents the majority, but rather a niche of citizens. They constitute and, in a somewhat clear way, assume themselves to be "outcasts/alternative thinkers", configuring themselves within the idea of the *other*, one who is interested in the society in which s/he lives. Interested in participating in the socio-political dynamic, they resort to war lingo to refer to the relevance of the information. As Natércia states, "it is always a weapon, and looking into the different media is important" (Interview 1), and Joaquim, "Information is at the basis of everything. It is power. To have information is to be ahead, to have the upper hand" (Interview 1). It is then clear that the relevance of the information is, in itself, a social value that enables social processes, as we pointed out before (Lewis, 2006; Mihailidis, 2012; Moeller, 2012).

Information is considered as a state of mind, a tool for reinforcing ways of understanding and participation. This profile presents few oscillations over time, both in terms of the intensity of participation and in the ways of news consumption and use of new media. There are evolutions, but no alterations. There are four essential media formats in this group: the internet, newspapers (paper and online editions), TV and, lastly, the radio. Here we find the assertion of the virtuous circle, focused on news consumption, to which Pipa Norris (2000: 277) referred to; however, it is necessarily a widened circle – that is, it is not focused only on the news.

Political information follows the same diversity line, especially in 2010. It implies looking at different media, participating in debates, watching debates on TV (the nightly news is, in these cases, insufficient), looking at information from other parties and accessing the parties' websites. Although not the object of this paper, it should be noted that we have found, especially in this profile, distinctive traits regarding the political tendencies to which the youths identify themselves with, in line with what was detected more than two decades ago by Manuel Braga da Cruz (1990: 248). As far as trust in the media is concerned, the

individuals belonging to more left-wing parties stated that they did not trust them, but that they thought they were needed for the running of the democracy. Dahlgren (2009) considers that, in order for democracy to work, a balance between trust and mistrust is important. This discussion was fully evident in the interviews and focus groups.

Family is of great importance in the political socialization and news consumption in this group, although in this stage of the research in which they participated, all of them were already capable of independently choosing far beyond family concepts. When questioned about the reason why they watched the news, we again find family identifiers, the need to tally in terms of knowledge and the ability to converse and argue. Carlos highlighted the fact that he started watching the news from early on, highlighting his grandparents' influence: "I don't know ... I remember reading and listening to the news from an early age, going to lunch at my grandparents' and the TV being switched on for the afternoon news. If I don't watch the news on a given day, I find it weird. I feel like I'm at the same level as other people" (Carlos, Interview 2)⁸. Rui highlighted the need to be informed in order to vote. Carla, on the other hand, spoke of the necessity of being informed in order to be able to argue.

There is an informal environment for discussing the news in their homes, and all of them can (and want to) give their opinion. "There are no rules, everyone voices their opinion" (Carlos, Interview 1); "It's relaxed!" (Joaquim, Interview 2); "Freedom and joy!" (Natércia, Interview 2); and "I have a more playful discourse at home, I ironically comment on what my grandmother says, but at home it does count as work" (Lito, Interview 2). What stands out, for instance, in comparison with the other groups' answers, is that there is an enhancement of the news' symbolic importance at home, which favours the social ties with those experiencing the same news. The (nuclear and broad) family emerged as a constructive pillar of the youths' will to be informed, but sharing information (political or not) is extended to other groups, including people they do not know. Family is the social place where they found the fuel for their interest in the news and for participation. Even when faced with low economic capital, the civic and social capital overtake those difficulties.

This group possesses a high participation intensity, including that on behalf of others. It is also the group that maintains its stability over time, focusing on political questions and participating in different and various activities, including political parties, although it may alternate its way of dealing with them depending on the political moment and on the party currently in power. It is clear that when answering the direct question on participation activities, they leave many aside, because they tend to encompass everything in a more generic sense, and detail ends up being lost in the subject of participation (party, campaign, volunteering, among others). Participation is also considered a means of experimenting: The informants assume that they are curious about understanding how different ways of participation are formed, how they occur and what impact they have. Citizenship and participation are, obviously, learned through practice and personal investment (Dahlgren, 2006: 273; Buckingham, 2006/2000: 203).

I tried to talk with as many different people as possible. With people in the party, it's my normal channel of politics; adults, my father, friends of my parents, with my father's lawyer. And I also discussed politics with people who don't have any political interests, on the bus, for instance [laughs]! (Joaquim, Interview 1)

Their discourses are polarized between right and left. In the debate, interviews and focus groups, news and digital media were associated in their relation to the political power and influences that exist but should not exist. Let us examine the divisions between left and right in the digital media conceptions, the different ways of participation, the use of pamphlets/direct contact with the population and the environment and protests. This confrontation between left and centre-right was always present in focus groups 3 and 4. A debate regarding the intentions behind the protests was also launched in focus group 3, considering that these too are a sign of belonging to either left or right, and it led to a debate regarding the main protests that occurred in Portugal in 2011.

Joaquim: There are people who manifest themselves but do not vote, but I don't think it's significant, comparing with people ... a lot of people who are partisan right-wing youths not going to vote.

Lito: Exactly!

Estela: They're old?! [Laugh]

Lito: Can I just ... when I say new discourse, they are not formal speeches we know as politics, not ideological or political speeches clearly. This is a new political and cultural discourse as follows: all these people, because they have different reasons to go for expression, are outraged about something, but there is something that unites them all. They have the sure political power and that representative democracy does not serve them what they want. It's not on the side of their interests. And that's the new political speeches. We can look at other cases, for example, in Brazil the social movements can apply to elections and...

Joaquim: Here too. [Simultaneous]

Lito: ... Yes, but in the form of a political party. ... But who fostered the culture of don't go vote? That's the big question. People are really free to decide if that's what they want? (Focus Group 3)

They have several participatory approaches. We will not dwell on analysing the answers regarding voting, but it is important to note that, even at this point, political ideologies are important when considering the meaning of voting or not voting. Questions such as vote legitimization, as well as reflections on citizen protests as pillars of citizenship exercise, are considered differently by informants from the left and from the right. In the interviews, they were all unanimous in considering the vote as fundamental to democracy, as we can attest

from this excerpt, which also indicates other ways of public participation. “My priority list for when I turned 18 was to vote, donate blood and get my driving license [...] There are many people who say: that’s stupid! But I consider voting as more than a duty, it is a right. It is something to be proud of” (Joaquim, Interview 1). In the focus group, however, dissimilarities between right and left emerged, in line with other previous examples, on protests, but also for instance on social intervention within deprived communities, thus reinforcing Chantal Mouffe’s propositions of an “agonistic model of democracy” (Mouffe, 2005a: 11).

It is in this political parties’ participant group that we find those who possess a participatory relationship with the traditional media. Only those who belong to party youths had the possibility of participating as authors in the traditional media. That occurred in regional press titles, in the *Jornal de Notícias*, and also in the party press (although here with an obviously different character). Furthermore, the individuals are also responsible for feeding the parties’ blogs, which differ from the school (classroom) blogs and personal blogs.

6. Discussion and final notes

Regarding their news consumption and its relationship with participation activities, we highlight the evident connection between these two poles and also between these aspects and the surrounding social structure. The first group has a low level of news consumption and a low level of participation. Participation activities are mainly connected with changes that are presented to them; they also show a low level of agency and commitment to activities over time. The second group showed a commitment to different activities of participation over time and they considered news as an empowerment tool for living in society. These findings support the idea of the need to think more deeply about the relationship between media and civic literacy through a joint approach.

Considering how both poles relate to social relationships and the ability to interact and deal with news media, from the reading of these opposite profiles, we can highlight the relevance of civic and cultural *habitus* in promoting media and civic literacy; basic social learning can then improve the potential created by the internet. The (non)utilization of the news items by both profiles supports the idea that this is a different synergistic process, in the sense that none of the cases showed that only one element, not even the internet, would be sufficient for the consumption to be improved in order to be used as a form of empowerment and as constituent elements of social citizenship. The *habitus* and civic culture were presented as positive for improving news consumption and participation over time. The only distinction we can make is that, in some cases, this learning process comes from an ongoing construction of a civic *habitus*, while in other cases it comes from a late awakening regarding these issues, which is enabled by a strong civic will and by strong civic relations. This later result implies the value, resilience and the strength of the self.

We add that this civic *habitus* may or may not be accompanied by a familiar cultural and economic capital, but it is always accompanied by a civic capital towards strengthening

the social bonds between producers and the citizens with whom they relate. The more extensive the nucleus of this identity, the more strengthened the civic *habitus*. It is also important to note that although we developed the profiles without regard to the capital and professional education of the parents, the reality is that we found a correlation in the first group between the profile and the parents' lower education (lower literacy levels) and lower qualified occupations. Nevertheless, in the second profile, we found a division between the parents' low and high qualifications; however, that, as mentioned, was not manifested in the responses of the informants and participatory activities, because other factors became relevant as a possible way to overcome this gap. Recalling what we stated previously, news literacy promotes a powerful connection between journalists and audiences/citizens (Mihailidis, 2012: 15), which may affect the quality of life in a positive manner (Moeller, 2012: 185).

The country has a long history of low civic media literacy, particularly during a long period of Portuguese dictatorship and information censorship, as well as lower rates in the adult population for higher education. The last three decades have shown a rapid change in the access to and consumption of audio-visual information, as well as relevant investment in digital infrastructures. However, in the current economic framework, a recent and still relatively weak middle class faces growing difficulties in accessing cultural goods, and will therefore be the target of preferential research attention. It is possible that libraries may assert themselves as relevant spaces regarding, for instance, internet access, because the middle class is being depowered in economic terms.

Biographical notes:

Maria José Brites has a PhD and a master's degree in communication sciences – journalism and media studies (FCSH-UNL) and a diploma in advanced studies in journalism and media studies (FCSH-UNL). She is Lecturer at Lusophone University of Porto and researcher at Centro de Investigação Media e Jornalismo (CIMJ). She has been working on audiences studies, particularly on youth, media/news and participation. Coordinates in Portugal the European project RadioActive Europe (<http://radioactive101.eu/>). Contact: britesmariajose@gmail.com.

References:

- Bagnoli, A. and Clark, A., 'Focus groups with young people: a participatory approach to research planning', *Journal of Youth Studies* 13(1), 2010, pp. 101 - 119.
- Banaji, S. and Buckingham, D., 'Young people, the internet, and civic participation: An overview of key findings from the civicweb project', *International Journal of Learning and Media* 2 (1), 2010, pp. 15-24.
- Barker, M., 'I Have Seen the Future and It Is Not Here Yet ...; or, On Being Ambitious for Audience Research', *The Communication Review* 9(2), 2006, 123-141.
- Bird, S. E., News practices in everyday life: Beyond audience response, in *The Routledge companion to news and journalism*. S. Allan (ed.). Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2010.

- Bird, S. E., Seeking the audience for news: Response, news talk, and everyday practices, in *The handbook of media audiences*. V. Nightingale (ed.). Malden e Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2011.
- Bourdieu, P., 'Los tres estados del capital cultural', trad. de Mónica. Landesmann, *Sociológica*, 5, 1987, pp. 11-17.
- Brites, M. J., O papel das notícias na construção da participação cívica e política dos jovens em Portugal: Estudo de caso longitudinal (2010-2011). PHD Thesis in Media and Journalism Studies. FCSH, New University of Lisbon, Lisbon, 2013.
- Brites, M. J., Jovens e informação política: A televisão ainda é importante?, In *Os media e as eleições europeias, legislativas e autárquicas de 2009*. R. Figueiras (org.). Lisboa: Universidade Católica Editora, 2012.
- Brites, M. J., 'Jovens (15-18 anos) e informação noticiosa: a importância dos capitais cultural e tecnológico', *Estudos em Comunicação*, 8, 2010, pp. 169-192.
- Buckingham, D., The making of citizens: Young people, news and politics, Londres e Nova Iorque, Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2006/2000.
- Cruz, M. B., 'A participação política da juventude em Portugal – As elites políticas juvenis' *Análise Social*, XXV (105-106), 1990, pp. 223-249.
- Cushion, Stephen, *Protesting Their Apathy? Young People, Citizenship and News*. JOMEC. Cardiff, Cardiff, 2006.
- Dahlgren, P., 'Opportunities, resources, and dispositions: Young citizens' participation and the web environment', *International Journal of Learning and Media* 2 (1), 2010, 1-13.
- Dahlgren, P., *Media and Political Engagement: Citizens, Communication, and Democracy*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2009.
- Dahlgren, P., 'Doing citizenship: The cultural origins of civic agency in the public sphere', *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 9(3), 2006, pp. 267-286.
- Dahlgren, Peter, 'The Internet and the Democratization of Civic Culture', *Political Communication* 17:4, 2000, pp. 335-340.
- Frau-Meigs, D., Media education. Crossing a mental rubicon, in *Empowerment through media education: an intercultural dialogue*. U. Carlsson, S. Tayie, G. Jacquinet-Delaunay and J. M. P. Tornero (ed.). Gotemburgo: The International Clearinghouse on Children, Youth and Media/Nordicom, 2008.
- Gomes, A., Cada vez mais faz sentido haver filtros, *Ser Jornalista em Portugal*. J. Rebelo (ed.). Lisboa: Gradiva, 2011.
- Gonnet, J., *Educação para os Media: As controvérsias fecundas*. Porto: Porto Editora, 2007.
- Gurevitch, M. and Blumler, J. G., State of the Art of Comparative Political Communication Research: Poised for Maturity?, in *Comparing Political Communication: Theories, Cases, and Challenges*. Esser, Frank and Pfetsch, Barbara. Cambridge, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2004.
- Halloran, J. D., Mass communication research: Asking the right questions. *Mass Communication Research Methods*. Hansen, Cottle, Negrine and Newbold. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1998.
- Higgins, J., Nairn, K. and Sligo, J., Peer research with youth: negotiating (sub)cultural capital, place and participation in Aotearoa/New Zealand, in *Participatory Action Research, Approaches and Methods: Connecting people, participation and place*. Sara Kindon. London and New York, Routledge, 2007.

- Hobbs, R., Cohn-Geltner, H. and Landis, J., Views on the News. Media Literacy Empowerment Competencies in the Elementary Grades, in *Yearbook 2011 – New questions, new insights, new approaches: Contributions to the research forum at the world summit on media for children and youth 2010*. C. V. Feilitzen, U. Carlsson and C. Bucht (ed.). Gotemburgo: The International Clearinghouse on Children, Youth and Media/Nordicom/University of Gothenburg, 2011.
- Jensen, K. B. and Rosengren, K. E., 'Five Traditions in Search of the Audience', *European Journal of Communication* 5(2), 1990, pp. 207-238.
- Kellett, M., Children as researchers: What we can learn from them about the impact of poverty on literacy opportunities?', *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 13, 2009, pp. 395-408.
- Kitzinger, J., Audience and Readership Research, in *The SAGE handbook of media studies*. Downing, John D. Thousand Oaks, London and New Delhy, SAGE, 2004.
- Lemish, D., *Children and Television: A Global Perspective*. Malden, Oxford and Carlton, Blackwell Publishing, 2007.
- Lewis, J., 'News and the empowerment of citizens', *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 9(3), 2006, pp. 303-319.
- Livingstone, S., Papaioannou, T., Pérez, M. M. G. and Wijnen, C. W., 'Critical Insights in European Media Literacy Research and Policy', *Critical Insights in European Media Literacy Research and Policy, special issue. MEDIJSKE STUDIJE/MEDIA STUDIES*. Zagreb, prosinac 2012. / December 2012. (2-13)
- Martín-Barbero, J., *De los medios a las mediaciones*. Bogotá: Unidate ditorial del Convenio Andrés Bello, 2003/1987.
- Mascheroni, G., 'Remediating participation and citizenship practices on social network sites', *Medien Journal* 3/2010.
- Meijer, I. C., The paradox of popularity. How young people experience the news. *RIPE Conference: November 16 - 18*. Amsterdam, 2006.
- Mihailidis, P., Introduction: News literacy in the dawn of a hypermedia age, *News literacy: Global perspectives for the newsroom and the classroom*. P. Mihailidis (ed.). Nova Iorque, Washington DC, Berna, Frankfurt, Berlim, Viena e Oxford: Peter Lang, 2012.
- Mihailidis, P., 'New Civic Voices & the Emerging Media Literacy Landscape', *Journal of Media Literacy Education*, 3:1, 2011, pp.4-5.
- Milner, H., Does civic education boost turnout? *Civic education and youth political participation*. M. Print and H. Milner (ed.). Roterdão, Boston e Taipei: Sense Publishers, 2009.
- Milner, H., *Civic literacy: How informed citizens make democracy work*. Hanover e Londres: Tufts University, 2002.
- Morley, D., 'Unanswered Questions in Audience Research', *The Communication Review* 9: 2, 2006, pp. 101-121.
- Moeller, S., Conclusion: News literacy and the courage to speak out, in *News literacy: Global perspectives for the newsroom and the classroom*. P. Mihailidis (ed.). Nova Iorque, Washington DC, Berna, Frankfurt, Berlim, Viena e Oxford: Peter Lang, 2012.
- Moeller, S. (2009). 'Media Literacy 101: Power to the People'
http://www.huffingtonpost.com/susan-moeller/media-literacy-101-power_b_182112.htm.
(visited 30/8/2011)
- Mouffe, Chantal, *On the Political (Thinking in Action)*, Londres e Nova Iorque, Routledge, 2005.

- Norris, P., *A virtuous circle: Political communications in postindustrial societies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.
- Oldfather, P., "Songs come back most to them': Students' experiences as researchers', *Teory Into Practice*, 34(2), 1995, pp. 131-137.
- Patterson, T. E., *Young people and news*. Massachusetts, Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy, 2007.
- Press, A. L., 'Audience Research in the Post-Audience Age: An Introduction to Barker and Morley', *The Communication Review* 9(2), 2006, pp. 93-100.
- Rojas, V., Straubhaar, J., Spence, J., Roychowdhury, D., Okur, O., Pinon, J. and Fuentes-Bautista, M., 'Comunidades, capital cultural e inclusão digital: acompanhando as tendências tecnológicas numa década', *Media & Jornalismo*, 19, 10(2), 2011, pp.15-37.
- Ruspini, E., *Introduction to longitudinal research*, Londres e Nova Iorque: Routledge, 2002.
- Schrøder, K. C., From Semiotic Resistance to Civic Agency: Viewing Citizenship Through the Lens of Reception Research 1973-2010, in *The social use of media. Cultural and social scientific perspectives on audience research*. Bilandzic, Patriarche and Traudt. Bristol, Chicago: Intellect, 2012.
- Underwood, C., Parker, L. & Stone, L., 'Getting it together: relational habitus in the emergence of digital literacies', *Learning, Media and Technology*, 38:4, 2013, pp.478-494.
- Wayne, Mike, Petley, Julian, *et al.*, *Television News, Politics and Young People: Generation Disconnected?* Hampshire, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.

Notes:

¹ The initial sample was composed of a group of thirty-five individuals, who participated in a Portuguese longitudinal research study from 2010 to 2011 on youth, journalism and participation. For this article, we selected a small sample of twelve youngsters. In the low-income area: two females and three males; three 15-year-olds, a 17-year-old and an 18-year-old in 2010; and from political parties: three girls and four boys, aged between 15 and 18.

² Same as note i regarding selection for this article.

³ These were identified as participatory focus groups because we used these three moments to talk about the interviews that the participants conducted with peers, family and friends. With this methodology, the research had the opportunity to go outside the main sample.

⁴ Same as note i, regarding selection for this article.

⁵ Like Dino, Rute presented other ways of real participation, but also at home: "*I was involved in volunteer work. I helped small two-year-old children here, it was really nice. It was [technician name] who suggested my name, at first I didn't like it, but then I loved it. I did it for about three months. At home, it is also important; I help my mom and take care of my sister. And the centre*" (Rute, Interview 1).

⁶ As pointed out in the methodological approach, after the first focus group, they had the task of going into the field and asking some questions to other youngsters about the issues discussed in that first meeting.

⁷ Beatriz's graffiti creation is chiefly connected to the school and legalized processes.

⁸ Both Lito and Carlos, when asked to perform interviews on other youths on journalism and participation, also chose to carry out that research in a family context with their mothers and

grandparents. Both focused on global protests, but in Carlos' case, he wanted to understand the generation conflicts regarding the *Indignados*, while Lito was more focused on the March 12 protests (Portugal, 2011) and Occupy Wall Street. The presentation also helped them to talk about how they found it more difficult to transmit political messages to their friends than to their schoolmates.